



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE returns cultural antiquities to Saudi ambassador *13th Century coins were pilfered from Saudi territorial waters in the Red Sea*

WASHINGTON, DC – Department of Homeland Security officials today returned to the Saudi Government 132 pounds of ancient coins seized in an investigation after being illegally removed from a shipwreck in the Red Sea.

“Artifacts such as these coins are not trinkets that can be pilfered and sold to the highest bidder,” said Julie L. Myers, Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). “To their rightful owners, these artifacts are priceless items that are cherished and proudly displayed as a testament to their cultural history.”

“These coins are treasured artifacts that reflect the cultural heritage of humanity as well as Saudi Arabia’s unique history as an ancient trade center and as the birthplace of Islam,” said Saudi Ambassador Prince Turki Al-Faisal. “Their recovery and return to the Kingdom is an example of the deep friendship between Saudi Arabia and the United States and the respect the U.S. has for cultural heritage.”

ICE agents in Miami launched an investigation following a tip that led agents to a Key West man who admitted to improperly taking the coins while on a recreational dive in Saudi Arabia in 1994. An Interpol Red Notice posted by Saudi law enforcement provided additional information on the coins and the subject.

Records show that the subject communicated in chat rooms that focused on Islamic coins in order to learn how to restore the coins and to solicit possible buyers. Agents, acting in an undercover capacity, engaged the suspect via email eventually identifying themselves as ICE agents and confronting him in person with the facts of the case.

The subject surrendered the coins to agents on April 7, 2005 and the coins were administratively forfeited on July 9, 2005.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.